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Mr Patrick Shields  
Headteacher  
St Mary's Catholic High School  
Woburn Road  
Croydon  
CR9 2EE

Dear Mr Shields

### **Requires improvement: monitoring inspection visit to St Mary's Catholic High School**

Following my visit to your school on 18 May 2015, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave me and for the time you made available to discuss the actions you are taking to improve the school since the most recent section 5 inspection.

The visit was the first monitoring inspection since the school was judged to require improvement following the section 5 inspection in January 2015. It was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005.

Senior leaders and governors are taking effective action to tackle the areas requiring improvement identified at the recent section 5 inspection. The school should take further action to:

- ensure that governors are equipped with the necessary skills to challenge and hold the school to account for its effectiveness.
- Ensure that improvements are developed and sustained over time by increasing the capacity of all middle leaders through targeted training.

### **Evidence**

During the inspection, meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior and middle leaders; three groups of students; the Chair of the Governing Body; the Director for Education Commission from Southwark Diocese; the education consultant and the School Improvement Adviser from the local authority to discuss the actions taken since the last inspection. The school improvement action plan was evaluated. A range of documents were scrutinised including: the curriculum plan for all year groups; monitoring of teaching; minutes of management meetings and the

impact of performance management; the local authority's review of governance; the impact of performance management; minutes of governors' meetings and records of behaviour management.

## **Context**

Since the section 5 inspection, several teachers, including senior staff have either left the school or will be leaving at the end of the current school year. The senior team has been restructured and four new appointments have been made. A new deputy headteacher, previously seconded to the school, has been appointed to the permanent position and is responsible for the leading on behaviour and safety. A second deputy will take up the new appointment in June 2015, and will be responsible for the leadership of teaching and learning. A newly appointed assistant headteacher will take over the leadership of the special educational needs department in June 2015. An associate assistant headteacher, appointed internally, is responsible for the leadership of English and pastoral development.

The governing body has been restructured and a newly appointed chair leads the group.

The number of students expected to enter the sixth form at the start of the next academic year will be almost twice the current figure.

## **Main findings**

Discussions with staff, governors, students and other professionals working with you clearly indicate that the culture of the school has changed for the better under your leadership. Your vision for 'excellence and not mediocrity' is well supported by the senior and middle leaders and the diocese. You have not wavered in your actions to improve the performance of staff and accelerate students' progress. Consequently, you have been decisive in using performance management. Senior leaders meet with middle managers regularly, and records of meetings indicate that monitoring is more robust. Similarly, systems to monitor the quality of teaching and learning means that teachers know that expectations are high and the Teachers' Standards are expected to underpin their work. Monitoring records show that these changes have had a direct impact on improving the quality of teaching; the majority is reportedly good or better. Staff are responsive to the new marking policy; targeted training has reportedly been well received and the middle leaders are playing a leading role in developing good practice. They are rising to the challenges but know that they are developing the leadership and management skills necessary for rapid school improvement. Provision for their training and development is well planned. The action plan is detailed and includes clear targets and milestones for improvement.

Changes made are noticeable in all areas of work identified for improvement. Students spoke positively about the 'dramatic and drastic' change in behaviour and the new marking system. They say expectations are high and while they believe

that more could be done to recognise high achievers; they are very clear about making better progress. They are also knowledgeable about e-safety because there is better coverage of this topic in the curriculum. Important changes have been made to widen the sixth form provision. Students can now choose from a range of pathways linked to their needs and more courses are planned. Additionally, the quality of induction and guidance is much improved and is contributing to students being confident about their choices and destinations. Expert partners have also been used very well to increase students' awareness of keeping safe. Governors know the basic requirements for school improvement. Nevertheless, they are not at the stage of asking in-depth questions and neither is there sufficient challenge when holding you and your team to account. As a new body, they know well the areas for development and recognise that more urgency is needed primarily as the earlier review of their work was not acted on swiftly. Planned changes to equip them with required skills are about to take effect. These include, for example, commissioning a second review, training and working with a National Lead for Governance.

Ofsted may carry out further visits and, where necessary, provide further support and challenge to the school until its next section 5 inspection.

### **External support**

The local authority has appropriately increased the progress review meetings to two every term. These meetings provide challenge and you are finding them useful as they are the main support provided and rapid progress is expected. As a result, you are able to reflect on practice and hold staff to account at all levels. The local authority's review of governance and teaching, which found many shortcomings, contributed to you making a rapid start to developing the new strategic vision.

Good links have been established with consultants. The training provided is helping your staff to review their effectiveness and make changes swiftly. For example, middle leaders say training on observing teaching over time has sharpened their focus on students learning. Partnership work with good or outstanding schools across the London region is well planned. Work with Dunraven School and Ursuline School, Merton is focused on developing good practice in relation to the curriculum tracking progress and raising students' aspirations. It is however, too early to comment on the effectiveness of this work. Your work with the Catholic Teaching Alliance to enhance the school's effectiveness is at an early stage.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Director of Children's Services for Croydon and as below.

Yours sincerely

Carmen Rodney  
**Her Majesty's Inspector**